

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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Anent the hue and cry of environment versus heredity as the procreant of crime, memory seems to react precipitately to reproduction of the former.

MEMORY TEST



CRANDELL began the interview.
"You've been here since 1940?"

Miss Hudson had gray hair and a tired, patient smile. "Yes, sir. I believe it was 1940."

"And the sentence was life imprisonment?"

"Yes, sir."

I paged through the folder in front of me. "You were sent to prison for the murder—for the poisoning of your aunt? Isn't that right?"

"Yes, sir. For the poisoning of my aunt."

I looked up. "Why did you kill her?"

Her face became impassive. "Be-

By
Jack
Ritchie

cause she shot the robins. She knew I liked to watch them from the kitchen windows and so she shot them."

We knew all these things, of course. But when a prisoner ap-

pears before the parole board, we want to hear her talk. We feel that, to some extent, it aids us in determining whether to release the prisoner or not.

Amos Whitman, the third member of the board, leaned forward



MEMORY TEST

on his elbows. "I notice, from the records, that your conduct here has been exemplary. Not one black mark against you."

"No, sir," Miss Hudson said. "Not one black mark against me in twenty-four years." Her eyes went toward one of the windows. "I was thirty-eight when I came here."

Whitman glanced through his sheaf of papers. "In 1952 you became eligible for parole. You have applied five times since then and been turned down five times."

"Yes, sir," she said. "I applied five times and my application was rejected five times."

Whitman looked at Crandell and me for a moment, and then turned back to Miss Hudson. "Do you have any idea why?"

Her eyes flickered. "No, sir."

I made idle marks on my folder. "Do you have any living relatives?"

She shook her head. "None that I know of, sir."

I made another mark. "Any friends on the outside?"

"No, sir. I had no friends."

I looked up. "Do you have any friends in here? In this prison?"

She blinked and thought about that for a few moments. "Why yes, sir. I have a number of friends. Everyone's very nice to me."

We questioned her for another ten minutes and then she was allowed to leave the room.

Amos Whitman was new on the board. "I don't understand this at all," he said. "She's been eligible for parole since 1952 and yet she's been turned down five times."

Crandell smiled. "Just because someone is eligible for parole doesn't mean that we automatically grant it."

"I know," Whitman said. "But why not in this case? Her prison record has been spotless. And consider her age. She must have been about fifty when she first applied. That, in itself, would make her a good risk."

"Frankly," I said, "we certainly have to consider the question of her age right now. She's sixty-two. What would she do if we did release her? Could she get a job? And what kind of a job would it be?"

Whitman was clearly shocked. "You mean to say that you'd actually consider keeping her in prison just because of her age?"

Crandell shook his head. "The state expects us to use our judgment in cases like this, Amos. And it isn't a question of age. Miss Hudson happens to be a mass poisoner."

Whitman frowned and rifled through his papers. "She was sent to prison for the death of her aunt. That's all I have here."

I supplied the information. "Within a period of one month, her

uncle, her aunt, and her two adult cousins died. The authorities exhumed their bodies. All of them were found to contain lethal doses of arsenic. The state decided it would be sufficient to try her for the murder of her aunt."

Whitman smiled sheepishly. "What reasons did she give for killing the others?"

"She killed her uncle because he beat his horses," I said. "They still had some on farms in 1940. And she got rid of the two cousins because they drowned a litter of newborn kittens."

Crandell grinned. "Do you think we could send *her* out into the world, Amos? She's likely to poison anyone she sees mistreating an animal."

I lit a cigarette and took a few puffs before I spoke. "She was orphaned at the age of twelve and taken in by her aunt and uncle. They lived on a remote farm upstate. From what came out at the trial, it appears that they kept her a prisoner. Oh, not actually a prisoner, I suppose, but they never allowed her any friends or clothes, and it appears that she did almost all of the housework and the cooking."

Whitman sat up, his eyes bright. "And eventually she reached the age of thirty-eight. Don't you see? That's it. She didn't kill them be-

cause of horses being beaten, or kittens drowned, or birds shot, even if she thinks she did. She killed them because of what they had done to her, to her whole life."

Crandell rubbed his jaw. "I don't know. I'm just a businessman trying to serve the state on the parole board like a good citizen. I'm no psychiatrist."

He turned to me. "What do you think, Doctor?"

My wife's estate is quite lovely at this time of the year. From the dining room window, I watched her on the lawn with Prince.

Miss Hudson was busy with the

table settings. "I really don't know what I would have done for a living if you hadn't spoken out for me with the parole board, Doctor," she said.

Outside, the dog uttered several sharp yelps and then whined.

Miss Hudson came to the window.

Some people use kindness to train their dogs. Others use the whip.

Miss Hudson's eyes were wide, very wide, as she watched, and I did not think she would hear me if I spoke now.

I smiled as my wife raised the whip again.

Dear Fans:

Here are the particulars about the Alfred Hitchcock Fan Club:

Membership dues are one dollar which covers mailing costs and handling. (Please send coins or money orders, no stamps.) For this you will receive an autographed photo of Mr. Hitchcock, his biography, and a bulletin of current news, which will be issued four times a year. You can't imagine how rewarding it is to hear from so many loyal readers, and active, and incoming Fan Club members. I want to thank all of you for your enthusiastic interest.

P.O. Box 5425

Most sincerely,
Pat Hitchcock
Sherman Oaks, California